

# **A contribuição da gestão da mudança para os desafios da gestão escolar: análise das escolas públicas municipais da cidade de Pelotas/RS**

*Leandro Souza Trindade<sup>1</sup>  
Priscila Nesello<sup>2</sup>*

## **Resumo**

Este estudo visa identificar os desafios enfrentados pelos gestores das escolas públicas municipais de Pelotas no que diz respeito à mudança organizacional, com foco na análise da gestão da mudança dentro dessas escolas, considerando fatores como a expansão educacional, a descentralização dos processos e os impactos da pandemia. Para isso, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com os gestores escolares, abordando tópicos relacionados à gestão escolar e à gestão da mudança. Os resultados destacam desafios como resistência à mudança, comunicação inadequada, dificuldades na implementação de novas práticas e impactos na cultura escolar e nas práticas pedagógicas. Este estudo é pioneiro ao abordar especificamente os desafios enfrentados pelos gestores de Pelotas no que concerne à gestão da mudança, preenchendo uma lacuna na literatura. Além disso, contribui teoricamente ao ampliar o conhecimento nesse contexto de descentralização e pandemia, proporcionando implicações práticas valiosas para a administração escolar no município estudado e em contextos similares na Administração Pública.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação. Pandemia. Cultura escolar. Tecnologia.

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<sup>1</sup> Master's Degree in Public Administration from PROFIAP - Professional Master's Degree in Public Administration in a National Network, Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel)-Brazil, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0613-4117>.  
E-mail: lstrindade1995@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Post-Doctorate, Doctorate and Master in Administration from the University of Caxias do Sul (UCS). Professor of the Professional Master's Degree in Public Administration at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel)-Brazil, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9312-463X>.  
E-mail: pri.nesello@gmail.com.

# **The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS**

*Leandro Souza Trindade  
Priscila Nesello*

## **Abstract**

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by managers of municipal public schools in Pelotas regarding organizational change. We focused on the analysis of change management within these schools, considering factors such as educational expansion, the decentralization of processes, and the impacts of the pandemic. In order to achieve this, we conducted semi-structured interviews with school managers, addressing topics related to school management and change management. The results highlight challenges such as resistance to change, inadequate communication, difficulties in implementing new practices, and impacts on school culture and pedagogical practices. This study is pioneering in specifically addressing the challenges faced by Pelotas managers in relation to change management, filling a gap in the literature. Furthermore, it contributes theoretically by expanding knowledge in this context of decentralization and the pandemic, providing valuable practical implications for school administration in Pelotas and similar contexts in Public Administration.

**Keywords:** Education. Pandemic. School Culture. Technology.

# **La contribución de la gestión del cambio a los desafíos de la gestión escolar: análisis de las escuelas públicas municipales en la ciudad de Pelotas/RS**

*Leandro Souza Trindade  
Priscila Nesello*

## **Resumen**

Este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los desafíos enfrentados por los gestores de las escuelas públicas municipales de Pelotas en lo que respecta al cambio organizacional. Nos enfocamos en el análisis de la gestión del cambio dentro de estas escuelas, considerando factores como la expansión educativa, la descentralización de procesos y los impactos de la pandemia. Para esto, realizamos entrevistas semiestructuradas con los directores escolares, abordando temas relacionados con la gestión escolar y la gestión del cambio. Los resultados resaltan desafíos como la resistencia al cambio, una comunicación inadecuada, dificultades en la implementación de nuevas prácticas e impactos en la cultura escolar y las prácticas pedagógicas. Este estudio contribuye teóricamente al ampliar el conocimiento en este contexto de descentralización y pandemia, proporcionando valiosas implicaciones prácticas para la administración escolar en Pelotas y contextos similares en la Administración Pública.

**Palabras clave:** Educación. Pandemia. Cultura Escolar. Tecnología.

## Introduction

School management constantly faces challenges stemming from social transformations, such as globalization, the popularization of information and communication technologies, and changes in labor relations (BES et al., 2019). Moreover, unlike corporate management, school management involves dealing with people from diverse segments of society that make up the school community. Thus, managers in this field must work with students, teachers, staff, parents, and other members of the school community (BARBOSA, 2023).

These challenges intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted education, leading to the suspension of in-person activities and necessitating adaptation to remote learning (CNE, 2021). According to INEP (2022), during this period, 99.3% of Brazilian schools reported suspending in-person teaching activities, resulting in an average interruption of 279 days. This rate was even higher in public schools, where the average suspension time reached 287 days. Furthermore, in the 2020 school year, only 9.9% of schools nationwide resumed in-person activities. This percentage reflects a weighted average of public and private networks, considering the proportion of enrolled students in each. Specifically, 5% of public schools and 29.1% of private schools returned to in-person instruction, while the remaining schools resumed only in the 2021 school year.

In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, more than 60% of all schools adopted synchronous class transmission as a tool for conducting teaching activities with students. In the municipal network, however, only 36.5% of schools adopted this strategy, while 42% of municipal schools provided prerecorded classes online for students. This may reflect the lack of internet infrastructure in municipal schools, as well as the difficulty students face in accessing the internet (INEP, 2022). This transition, which abruptly shifted from in-person to remote learning, became known as emergency remote teaching. This sudden change had significant impacts not only on the school context but also on the individuals within it, particularly children, teachers, and parents (ASSIS; CONCEIÇÃO, 2023).

In this context of emergency remote teaching, another significant challenge became evident among school managers, teachers, and others involved in Brazilian education: the return to in-person activities. One of the main concerns at that time was ensuring a safe return while minimizing the negative impact on students (DARSIE; FURTADO, 2021). Thus, following the arrival of vaccines, a decrease in Covid-19 cases, and the favorable position of the Ministry of Education (MEC) on

resuming in-person classes, many Brazilian states and municipalities began gradually returning to the conventional model in 2021. However, it is important to note that a full return to in-person learning occurred nationally only in 2022 (ASSIS; CONCEIÇÃO, 2023).

In Rio Grande do Sul, Decree No. 56,171 reestablished mandatory in-person education for basic education in both public and private networks in November 2021. Aligning with this decision, the city government of Pelotas, a municipality in Rio Grande do Sul, also mandated that municipal schools resume in-person activities, adhering to the prevention and monitoring protocols established by the state government (AMARAL, 2021).

In this context, change management played a fundamental role (PMI, 2013), involving both internal and external stakeholders and requiring strategic and structural alignments (VOEHL; HARRINGTON, 2016). This is a continuous process that demands the use of models capable of simplifying theoretical complexity, allowing for a focused approach to the most relevant aspects (BURKE, 2008) and the development of change management skills to act strategically and precisely in response to the new reality (SAES, 2012). Given this, the present study aimed to identify the challenges faced by public school managers in the city of Pelotas concerning organizational change, analyzing how change management has been carried out within school institutions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This section presents concepts and relevant aspects in the fields of school management and change management, which are central elements of this study.

### **School Management**

Initially in Brazil, the administration of education was referred to as educational administration. However, over the decades, this rigid model no longer fulfilled its purpose due to a reconfiguration of society. Consequently, amid constant changes, more dynamic, flexible, and adaptable approaches became necessary, particularly with the advent of globalization, the popularization of ICTs, and changes in labor relations (BES et al., 2019).

Various regulations govern the actions and activities carried out in schools, including legal guidelines on how to conceive and implement educational and management practices. These norms aim to ensure general well-being and regulate teaching and learning processes, the roles of educational professionals, and the overall organization of institutions. Therefore, for school management to effectively perform its functions, it is important that its members become familiar

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS with specific legal frameworks, such as the Federal and State Constitutions, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), the National Education Plan (PNE), the National Curriculum Guidelines for different levels and types of education, state and municipal educational legislation, the regulatory and executive tools of the relevant system and network, the Teaching Statute, and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ADRIANO, 2017).

Since the purpose of schools is to foster individuals' social development by enhancing their physical, cognitive, and emotional potential, educational management is responsible for selecting and identifying the necessary and essential elements to develop appropriate educational practices to achieve this goal (ADRIANO, 2017). According to Bes et al. (2019), school management is not limited to administrative tasks; it must also address all pedagogical needs, which include legislation and teaching-learning processes. Thus, school management encompasses various areas, such as pedagogical management, administrative management, financial management, human resource management, and planning.

Pedagogical management is considered the most important area of school management as it is directly tied to promoting student learning and development, playing a central role within the school (BES et al., 2019). This area coordinates the activities of school professionals, guiding them based on shared principles and objectives. Its functions include establishing parameters for pedagogical coordination and teaching practices, providing teacher training, evaluating the effectiveness of educational efforts, implementing actions outlined in the political-pedagogical project, building the school's identity and autonomy, and developing the school curriculum in compliance with national, state, and municipal curriculum guidelines (LÜCK, 2009).

Administrative management is responsible for overseeing the school's assets, ensuring the proper use and maintenance of physical and material resources. Its responsibilities include managing physical resources, organizing school records and documents, handling student enrollments, and executing support services (LÜCK, 2009; TOLEDO, 2016).

Financial management has become increasingly relevant, especially due to the decentralization of management and the growing autonomy of schools. Effective financial management must ensure the maintenance of school infrastructure and the smooth functioning of daily activities (LÜCK, 2009; BES et al., 2019).

Human resource management, in turn, is considered the core of school management work, as the quality of education is directly linked to the competence of those involved. Leadership,

motivation, shared responsibilities, and conflict resolution are essential factors for continuously improving the quality of education (LÜCK, 2009).

School planning is a crucial process in all areas of education, involving decision-making about the organization, operation, and pedagogical approach of the school. The Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP) constitutes a significant part of this planning and is developed with the participation of the school community (LÜCK, 2009).

## **Municipal Education Plan – Pelotas/RS**

The Municipal Education Plan (PME) of Pelotas, in Rio Grande do Sul, is a project that emphasizes education as a driving force for public policies that encompass various sectors, extending beyond those traditionally associated with education. The PME is developed through the active participation of different segments of civil society, school communities, public authorities (executive, legislative, and judicial branches), and labor unions (PELOTAS, 2015).

Additionally, the PME of Pelotas outlines nine guidelines to be followed: the eradication of illiteracy; universal access to schooling; overcoming all forms of inequality, especially educational inequalities, with an emphasis on promoting the principles of respect for human rights, and ethnic-racial, regional, social, religious, gender, and sexual orientation diversity; improving the quality of education; preparing individuals for work and citizenship, with an emphasis on the moral and ethical values that underpin society; promoting the principle of democratic management of public education; valuing education professionals and the school community, strengthening School Councils; increasing the educational attainment of the population; and eradicating all forms of inequality, particularly in education, with an emphasis on promoting the principles of respect for human rights, and ethnic-racial, regional, social, religious, gender, and sexual orientation diversity.

## **Change Management**

The rapid and constant emergence of demands for change within organizations, especially from the late 20th century onward, has brought increased attention to improving the effectiveness of managing processes related to organizational change, both in the business and academic spheres (SMITH et al., 2015). In this context, the field of change management studies has gained prominence by focusing on the ongoing need for adaptation in contemporary organizations. For this same reason, the topic of organizational change has been a central theme in debates in both academic and business

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS settings, with numerous concepts being mobilized to explain the phenomenon of change (BRESSAN, 2004; SANTOS, 2014).

According to Anderson and Anderson (2001), the process of change management requires a multidimensional approach encompassing three elements: content, people, and process. Content refers to what has been or needs to be changed that is, the target object of change which can relate to various organizational factors such as structure, systems, processes, strategies, technologies, and work practices. People, on the other hand, pertain to the individuals who are designing, implementing, supporting, or being directly or indirectly impacted by the change. This element involves the behaviors, emotions, and mindsets of the humans involved in the change. Process corresponds to how changes are planned, designed, and implemented, encompassing the actions being carried out to achieve the change.

Effective change management requires the use of structured approaches that enhance the ability to deal with emerging situations. With this in mind, various models for change management have been designed to help successfully manage the change component (PMI, 2013). According to Burke (2008), models are important tools for change management as they help break down the complexity of theory into manageable parts, enabling a focus on the most relevant aspects of a given process. An example of this is the Change Life Cycle Framework, developed by the Project Management Institute (PMI), an iterative model in which adaptive change occurs continuously in response to evolving circumstances (PMI, 2013). This model consists of five phases: change formulation, change planning, change implementation, transition management, and change sustainment.

In the change formulation phase, it is important to translate the strategic plan into tangible objectives aligned with stakeholder needs. This requires identifying the need for change, assessing readiness for change, and outlining the scope of change. Change planning involves detailing how and what will be altered, integrating people, processes, technology, structure, and culture, while also planning stakeholder engagement and the transition. During change implementation, the project's deliverables are handed over to the business, preparing the organization for change and mobilizing stakeholders. Transition management aims to sustain long-term changes by integrating results into operations and measuring adoption rates and benefits. Finally, change sustainment involves continuous activities such as communication, consultation, sense-making, and measuring the impact on the organization.



## **Research Design**

The present study employed an applied research methodology with a qualitative and exploratory approach. The object of study comprised the municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas, which, according to the website of the city's Municipal Department of Education and Sports ([site.pelotas.com.br/educacao/portal/escolas](http://site.pelotas.com.br/educacao/portal/escolas)), total 94 institutions (SMED, 2022). The study was directed toward the managers of these 94 schools, with respondents including individuals holding the positions of principal, vice-principal, and coordinator.

Data collection was conducted through emails sent to schools, followed by remote interviews. A total of three email rounds were sent (the first on June 28 and the last on August 23, 2022), resulting in ten remote interviews. These interviews lasted approximately five hours in total and took place between June 30 and October 5, 2022.

The interview script was semi-structured, developed based on the literature, and validated by two specialists in the fields of school management and project management. Data analysis was performed using the content analysis technique (BARDIN, 2011) with the NVivo software. The analysis categories were predefined and covered areas of school management (pedagogical, administrative, financial, human resources, and planning) and elements of change (content, people, and process). Within this framework, challenges and opportunities, the current change process, the actors involved in the change process, and their perception of adherence to change were analyzed. These categories were considered the study's outcomes, which supported the development of a set of guidelines for school management and the proposed change management model for municipal public schools.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

This section presents the challenges and opportunities identified for the municipal public schools of Pelotas based on the interviews conducted, as well as the challenges and opportunities for adopting change management practices in these institutions. Next, an analysis of the current change process in municipal public schools and its characteristics is discussed. Finally, guidelines for school management and the proposed change management model for these institutions are addressed.

## Challenges and Opportunities in Municipal Public Schools

Contemporary society is in constant flux, creating both challenges and opportunities for schools. School managers in the municipal schools of Pelotas confirm this challenging dynamic within the school environment, where they face daily challenges and must quickly adapt to changes. However, they also acknowledge that these moments of change can bring opportunities for growth, learning, and improvement. The main challenges of school management during change processes include resistance to change, inadequate communication, difficulties in implementing new practices, impacts on pedagogical practices and school culture, and the need to engage stakeholders. During the interviews, several topics related to the current school context were discussed, with the Covid-19 pandemic being one of the main themes due to its significant impact on schools.

In a recent study on the sustainability of educational institutions, Rasli et al. (2024) identified the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity for educators and policymakers to reassess educational systems and reconsider what is essential, necessary, and desirable for future generations. According to these authors, four main themes emerged as pillars for the sustainability of higher education institutions in the post-pandemic period: educational reform; digital transformation; resilience and change management; and sustainability combined with agility and flexibility.

School management is a professional field that encompasses planning, organizing, leading, guiding, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating educational processes, focusing on promoting student learning and development. Beyond administrative demands, school management involves legal aspects and the teaching-learning process (LÜCK, 2009). It consists of areas such as pedagogical management, administrative management, financial management, human resource management, and planning (BES et al., 2019).

Pedagogical management is responsible for promoting student learning and development, playing a central role in school management. It includes actions aimed at training and learning, aligned with national, state, and municipal curriculum guidelines. Its main missions include fostering unified efforts among school professionals, establishing guiding parameters for pedagogical coordination and teaching practices, training teachers, and evaluating their effectiveness (LÜCK, 2009).

According to the interviewees, the area of human resource management is the most challenging (accounting for 55% of coded references), followed by pedagogical management (29%). These areas tend to present the greatest number of challenges or opportunities during periods of

change. For example, during the pandemic, managing people and ensuring the continuity of pedagogical activities were significant obstacles, as highlighted by the statement from interviewee 4:

E4 (speaking about challenges in school management): Our greatest challenges are with human resource management; whenever we have to work with people, it becomes more difficult where we don't, it's easier. As a result, pedagogical management is also affected because it involves people. A significant challenge during the pandemic, for example, was dealing with colleagues.

In terms of pedagogical management, it is responsible for promoting student learning and development, playing a crucial role in school management (LÜCK, 2009). According to the interviewed managers, the use of technology in education constitutes the main contemporary challenge faced by pedagogical management, as many students and teachers are not prepared for this new trend, leading to adaptation difficulties, as indicated by interviewee 6:

E6: *We create expectations regarding this digital transformation that are not met. People are still not well-prepared, whether teachers or students, to adapt to what would be ideal.*

Communication with students and their families was also cited as a challenge, particularly in conveying information about changes to the school's pedagogical proposal. During the pandemic, remote learning brought significant challenges, such as creating or adapting activities and methodologies for non-presential education. This required the use of technologies and new ways of delivering activities to maintain connections with students and their families. However, many teachers and students lacked the resources necessary to create and access this content, as highlighted by interviewee 2:

E2: *Regarding technology, many students didn't have computers or broadband internet access, and even some of our teachers didn't have computers. Yet, we had to work with these technologies for remote activities.*

According to Purnomo (2024), introducing a Digital School Culture (DSC) into schools is a crucial initiative for developing human resources with the exceptional skills required in the future. This effort aims to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly digital world, ensuring they acquire advanced competencies essential for their professional and personal success. The authors' study, conducted with schools in Indonesia, identified seven stages of change management in transitioning from the status quo to DSC. These stages include forming teams, resource preparation methods, vision alignment, digital skills development, addressing obstacles, short-term reviews, and initiatives to increase technology acceptance.

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS

The transition to DSC involved creating digital modules, implementing online and hybrid learning (blended learning), and digitalizing learning administration to improve decision-making processes. The return to in-person activities also brought challenges, such as the learning gaps accumulated during the period without in-person classes or with emergency remote teaching. Interviewee 7's statement supports this perspective:

E7 (speaking about pedagogical management): *In the pedagogical area, management is a bit more complicated because we have to convey and communicate information correctly to families and students. With the teachers, we aim to hold in-person meetings so that information is not lost, allowing us to align the work and the pedagogical direction. However, the biggest challenge is often when it comes to communicating with the parents.*

Despite the challenges, the pandemic also provided opportunities for improvement in pedagogical management, such as greater focus on the content taught and the appreciation of classroom time. Teachers recognized the importance of the teacher-student relationship and the need to be present to address questions and enrich the learning process, as highlighted by interviewee 10:

E10: *Teachers realized, for example, that many topics we require from students aren't as important. During the pandemic, with reduced time and the difficulty of explaining concepts, teachers ended up focusing on more objective content. I think this was positive because a lot of time is wasted on certain things, and this helped optimize time. There's also the issue of valuing the teacher's presence in the school. People noticed the lack of having a teacher nearby to clarify doubts, which was a good thing. Teachers also recognized the importance of the teacher-student relationship because one cannot exist without the other—it's this exchange that enriches the learning process.*

Regarding administrative management, it involves the care and maintenance of physical and material resources, which is essential to ensure the quality of the educational process (LÜCK, 2009; TOLEDO, 2016). During the pandemic, the challenges in administrative management included managing paperwork and reports, providing masks, and the lack of materials in some schools. However, the greatest challenge reported by the managers of municipal public schools in Pelotas was organizing physical spaces for the return to in-person activities, especially in institutions with limited infrastructure. The following excerpt from interviewee 8's statement supports this assertion:

E8: It was challenging to address the issue of spaces, which is complicated for us because our school is very small, and we couldn't mix the groups.

Outside the pandemic context, changes in administrative management also present challenges, such as dealing with school transportation, building maintenance, and purchasing materials. Many

activities require requests to the Municipal Department of Education, as highlighted by interviewee 1:

E1: Everything we need, we forward to the Department of Education, and then they send it to us. We have a specific day each month to request materials. For anything beyond my authority, I have to go to the Department and request authorization.

On the other hand, moments of transformation can also present opportunities for administrative management, such as investments in improvements and technologies within the school. Financial management in schools is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the structure and educational processes, as well as making good use of public resources (LÜCK, 2009; BES et al., 2019). One challenge mentioned by the interviewees regarding financial management concerns the bureaucracy involved with funds and budgets. Some managers feel that too much time is spent dealing with budgets and financial reporting, which hampers agility in decision-making during times of change. The following excerpt from interviewee 9 clarifies this point:

E9: Sometimes we can't dedicate enough thought to differentiated pedagogical activities because we're preoccupied with budgets and financial reporting we have to chase these things down.

Additionally, many managers reported insufficient investments from the City Hall, which complicates the process of change within schools. However, during the pandemic, one manager highlighted an opportunity in financial management related to reallocating extra resources for school infrastructure improvements, derived from the period when the institution was closed and certain materials were not used.

Human resource management, in turn, is fundamental to school management, as the school's performance depends on the competencies of the people involved in the educational process (LÜCK, 2009; BES et al., 2019). The challenges faced in human resource management during times of transformation include the lack of benefits to motivate the team, especially in the public sector, where offering extra benefits beyond salary is not possible. During the pandemic, there was resistance from teachers to change their work methods and adopt remote teaching, requiring effort and persuasion from managers to overcome this resistance. The following excerpt from interviewee 1 highlights this issue:

*E1: Convincing the professionals that they needed to make this change to maintain their connection with the students was quite challenging. But we discussed it, held several meetings, as dialogue is a priority for us, and from those conversations, many suggestions emerged.*

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS

Upon the return to in-person teaching, challenges arose related to professionals' fears regarding their health, as it was necessary to ensure safety while also convincing teachers to return to the classroom. The following excerpt from interviewee 1 illustrates this perspective:

E1 (speaking about the return to in-person teaching): *In human resource management, I had to pay very close attention to each individual because colleagues were afraid to return. Even preparing lessons caused anxiety, but everything worked out in the end. (...) Some teachers took longer to return after the mandatory date because they didn't feel safe going back to the classroom.*

Moreover, complying with protocols and restrictions also posed a challenge in human resource management during this period. Psychological issues were also highly prevalent, especially in the pandemic context, requiring a careful approach to address the mental well-being of those involved, as highlighted by interviewee 6:

E6: *Now we have to deal with many challenges in human resource management because many illnesses have emerged, especially those related to mental health.*

On the other hand, the change brought opportunities, such as the use of technology for internal school communication and staff participation in online courses and training sessions. The statements from interviewees 2 and 7 support these claims:

E2: *Today, technology allows us to hold our pedagogical meetings remotely. These were innovations that came from this process of change to help us, and it's amazing that we can talk remotely*

E7: *While we were in the pandemic, for example, we had opportunities to pursue new courses, new training, and new approaches. We had several opportunities for courses offered by universities and the governing body. Those who didn't settle into complacency and wanted to participate in online activities had opportunities.*

School planning is a crucial process in all areas of education, involving the understanding of goals, directions, and perspectives in education and school management (TOLEDO, 2016). The main challenge highlighted by school managers in the area of planning is the lack of time to carry it out, especially when changes are urgently imposed by public authorities, leaving little room for planning school actions. The lack of time to communicate with the community and involve students and teachers is noted as a significant obstacle. The following excerpt from interviewee 3's statement illustrates this issue:

E3: *Sometimes the city hall just signs the decree, and that's it—they don't think about the people working in schools. There's not even time to talk to the community,*



to the parents, to explain how things are going to be. If we had time to talk, it would be much smoother.

However, moments of change also provide opportunities. An example of this is the integration with the school community, which fosters suggestions and feedback to improve planning.

## Challenges and Opportunities in Change Management

Change management is a comprehensive and structured approach to transitioning individuals, groups, and organizations from the current state to a desired future state, aiming to integrate and align people, processes, structures, culture, and strategy (PMI, 2013). Anderson and Anderson (2001) emphasize that change management is a continuous process involving three main elements: content, people, and process.

The element of people in change management (the most prominent category in the interviews, with 87% of references) refers to individuals directly or indirectly involved in a change, encompassing behaviors, emotions, and mindset. One of the most significant challenges in this aspect, according to the interviewed managers, is dealing with the psychological and emotional impact caused by changes, especially in situations like the pandemic. Managers need to find ways to support and reassure members of the school community to ensure the continuity of the educational process.

Additionally, the return to in-person activities during the pandemic also brought fear and resistance due to health concerns, which posed an additional challenge for school management, as highlighted by interviewee 3's statement:

*E3: There was some resistance from the staff upon returning, because they were very afraid of the disease, of children coming in sick, and we had to break through those barriers.*

Adaptation and readjustment to changes are also challenges faced by those involved. Students may display different behaviors, and teachers may take some time to readapt to the classroom routine. Furthermore, the lack of understanding or comprehension of the changes can hinder their acceptance by those involved, requiring managers to make efforts to clarify doubts and mitigate resistance. The statements from interviewees 1 and 8 highlight this perception:

*E1: When there are changes that have more impact, there are always more people opposing them, not understanding or putting obstacles in the way, which makes the process more difficult.*

*E8 (speaking about the return to in-person learning): Now, when they returned, the students were very withdrawn and scared, behaviors that weren't there before, so the teachers said it was like having all new children at school. The teachers had also been out of the classroom for a while, so it took them some time to readapt to the*

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS  
*classroom routine, taking care of many children at the same time. It was a process of readjustment.*

However, amidst the challenges, change management also presents opportunities. The need for modification can stimulate personal and professional growth for the individuals involved, encouraging them to seek new skills and knowledge. Through dialogue and participation, managers can ease the impact of changes, reducing shock and providing a calmer environment.

The element of process in change management (which accounted for 81% of the references) refers to how changes are planned, designed, and implemented. One of the main challenges in this regard is using the correct process in the proper way and at the right time. According to the interviewed managers, achieving this goal is a difficult task that usually requires several attempts before succeeding. Schools do not allow many mistakes, making it crucial to quickly find the process that will lead to the desired change, as highlighted by interviewee 7:

*E7: The school doesn't allow much time for mistakes; so, if we take a wrong step, we need to quickly go back and redo it, figure out where we went wrong, and try to get it right.*

Additionally, transformations in the school context affect all aspects of the school, requiring that the change processes occur quickly and effectively. However, the imposition of urgent directives by the public authorities creates an additional challenge for school management. The lack of time to organize and communicate the changes to those involved makes it difficult to properly implement the desired modifications, as highlighted by interviewee 4:

*E4: A very radical and sudden change disrupts things a lot. It takes us time to organize because we have the children's responsibilities. Everything takes time to organize, we have to talk to the parents. These very radical changes take time to happen because they involve many people.*

Despite these difficulties, some managers adopt a proactive approach, keeping the team informed about the possibilities for change and preparing in advance. There are also managers who seek to transform moments of instability into opportunities, using changes as a way to improve the school's structure and services. Interviewee 9's statement supports this claim:

*E9 (speaking about moments of change): In these moments, we encourage the staff to carry out every small action with the highest quality possible, so we take advantage of the need to improve our school.*

In turn, the element of content in change management refers to the focus of the change, i.e., what has been or needs to be altered within the organization. In the interviews with the managers of municipal public schools in Pelotas, several recent changes that affected the school context were



identified. However, the main modifications mentioned were related to the pandemic, especially emergency remote teaching and the return to in-person classes.

In the case of remote learning, the content of the change (accounting for 49% of the references) involved the need to adapt lessons to the online format, requiring managers to create plans for remote activities and adopt new teaching practices. Upon returning to in-person classes, modifications included the implementation of health protocols, such as the use of masks and the organization of a system for class rotation. The following excerpt from interviewee 5's statement illustrates this aspect:

*E5: During the pandemic, we had to attend to students online, which was difficult—a very big change for us here at the school.*

In addition to modifications related to the pandemic, other recent transformations were mentioned, such as changes in the school calendar, court decisions regarding the number of students per class, and changes in the school's internal processes, administrative management, and the way documents and financial reports are handled. As indicated by interviewee 10, decisions from the public authorities, especially the Department of Education, impacted the content of the changes in municipal public schools:

*E10 (speaking about changes): Generally, the changes with the greatest impact are those that come from the Department of Education. These are changes in workload, curriculum structure, student attendance schedules, and support classes. (...) A more recent change is that the municipality is now organizing the school regulations, which is a document that organizes the entire life of the municipal schools and will affect issues like the evaluation method and the grading system for each trimester.*

Finally, the school managers expressed a desire for greater financial resources from the public authorities, highlighting this as a desired content of change, as emphasized by interviewee 6:

*E6: The city hall could invest more in the schools. We have little funding allocated to the school, and many things are hindered by financial issues.*

They believe that adequate financial investment would be essential to improve working conditions in schools.

## **Analysis of the Current Change Process in Municipal Public Schools and Its Characteristics**

The triggers for organizational change can come from the external environment or the characteristics of the organization itself. Change does not always occur accidentally; it is often planned and intentional. The change process follows a model composed of five phases: formulation, planning, implementation, transition management, and change sustainment.

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS

During the change process, it is important to establish the reasons why the change is necessary, creating an environment where people are engaged and motivated to achieve the desired results. Developing a clear vision is essential for the members of the organization to understand the goals and benefits of the change, which is why communication plays a crucial role in gaining support and adherence to the proposed change. The statement from interviewee 8 highlights this perception:

*E8 (speaking about communication): Meetings are the time when we talk about any changes. But if it's something that can't wait for the meeting, I post it in our school group, where everyone has access and can check it. For communicating with parents, we use WhatsApp groups, where we share information. It's our most efficient communication channel and the one we use the most.*

In the formulation of changes, the managers of municipal public schools in Pelotas mentioned that modification initiatives usually come from the Department of Education or from the school's own management. Additionally, they reported that while broader transformations are proposed by the public authorities, more specific and internal issues are suggested by the managers. Most managers engage in some form of planning for changes, involving discussions with the leadership team, teachers, staff, and the school community, as can be observed in the following excerpt from interviewee 7's statement:

*E7: Planning usually goes through meetings. First, we have our team meeting to outline the progress. Then, we take it to the teachers and staff so that they can participate in the decisions and see what is possible and what is not. Only then do we approach the students and the community, in order to truly build something.*

Regarding structured processes, formal protocols, or models, the managers did not report using them extensively in the schools. Meetings are primarily used for internal communication, while social media is employed for both internal and external communication. While internal communication aims to promote participation in decision-making, external communication aims to inform and explain the changes to those involved.

As for evaluating changes, the managers emphasized the importance of this activity, although structured methods are not used. Evaluation is carried out through conversations in meetings with the school team or through daily feedback, as highlighted in interviewee 10's statement:

*E10: There is feedback from the teachers and students on a daily basis. Parents, when they don't like something, usually come on their own to talk to the school. With the teachers, we also have regular meetings.*

## Actors in the Change Process

School management involves the management team, such as principals, supervisors, coordinators, and counselors, along with the active participation of teachers and the school community (LÜCK, 2009). In the change process, both internal and external actors may be involved, and a key role is played by the change agent, who is responsible for managing the transformations within the organization (ROBBINS et al., 2010; VOEHL; HARRINGTON, 2016).

According to the managers of the municipal public schools in Pelotas, the primary actors in the change process are the students, as they are the most affected by the process. Teachers also play a crucial role, being responsible for implementing the changes in practice. Other important actors in driving change include the school leadership, families, staff, and the public authorities, with particular emphasis on the Department of Education.

## Adherence to Change

Reactions from organizational actors to change range from immediate acceptance to complete resistance. The response of the individuals involved is the key factor in the success or failure of a change process, making it important to analyze issues such as the degree of adherence, the results, and the benefits of the transformation implemented to identify problems and make future adjustments (BRESSAN, 2004; PMI, 2013). According to most of the managers interviewed, the change processes in their schools have been effective. However, they also mentioned difficulties related to resistance from school staff members, as expressed in interviewee 2's statement:

*E2: Change is a difficult process; for everything new, people's first reaction is to reject it, but eventually, we manage to make things happen.*

Suggestions were made by the interviewees to improve adherence to change, including better communication and dialogue from the public authorities, as well as greater participation and involvement from colleagues in the change processes. These suggestions are exemplified in the following excerpts from interviewees 3 and 5's statements:

*E3: It would be interesting if there were better communication from the Department of Education, with more openness towards the principals. Talking to us and informing us more efficiently.*

*E5: I think it would be better if people were more voluntarily participative, because often we have to demand more effective participation.*

## Guidelines for School Management and Proposed Change Management Model for Municipal Public Schools

The change management model proposed by PMI presents a systematic framework that can be applied to school management during moments of transformation. There are similarities between the elements of this model and the elements previously discussed in school management. These similarities include preparation, communication, stakeholder engagement, resistance management, and monitoring and adaptation.

Based on these similarities and the challenges faced by school management, guidelines have been developed to address change in the schools of Pelotas. These guidelines aim to provide a structured approach to tackling the challenges, including specific actions for each one. Implementing these guidelines requires the engagement of all those involved in order to achieve effective and sustainable change within the school institutions.

It is important to highlight that these guidelines were developed based on PMI principles, the PME guidelines of Pelotas, and the challenges identified by the interviewees. Table 1, presented below, outlines the guidelines and proposed actions for each challenge, offering guidance for school management during times of change.

**TABLE 1: GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT DURING TIMES OF CHANGE.**

GUIDELINES	ACTIONS
<b>Communication Effective and Dialogue</b>	Establish clear communication channels between the Department of Education, the principals, and other stakeholders involved in the change process.
	Hold regular meetings to inform about the proposed changes, clarify doubts, and listen to suggestions.
	Create an online space to share information, documents, and promote dialogue among those involved.
<b>Participation and Early Consultation</b>	Conduct early consultations with teachers and other staff involved in the proposed changes, aiming to engage them in decision-making and gather their opinions.
	Hold workshops and discussion groups to encourage active participation from all stakeholders in planning and implementing the changes.
<b>Resistance Resolution</b>	Identify the main resistances and concerns of those involved and seek strategies to overcome them.
	Conduct awareness and training sessions, highlighting the benefits of the proposed changes and showcasing successful cases in other schools.
	Adapt the change implementation strategy, if necessary, to gradually involve people and provide a smoother transition.
<b>Post-Change Analysis</b>	Conduct periodic evaluations to analyze the results and benefits of the implemented changes.

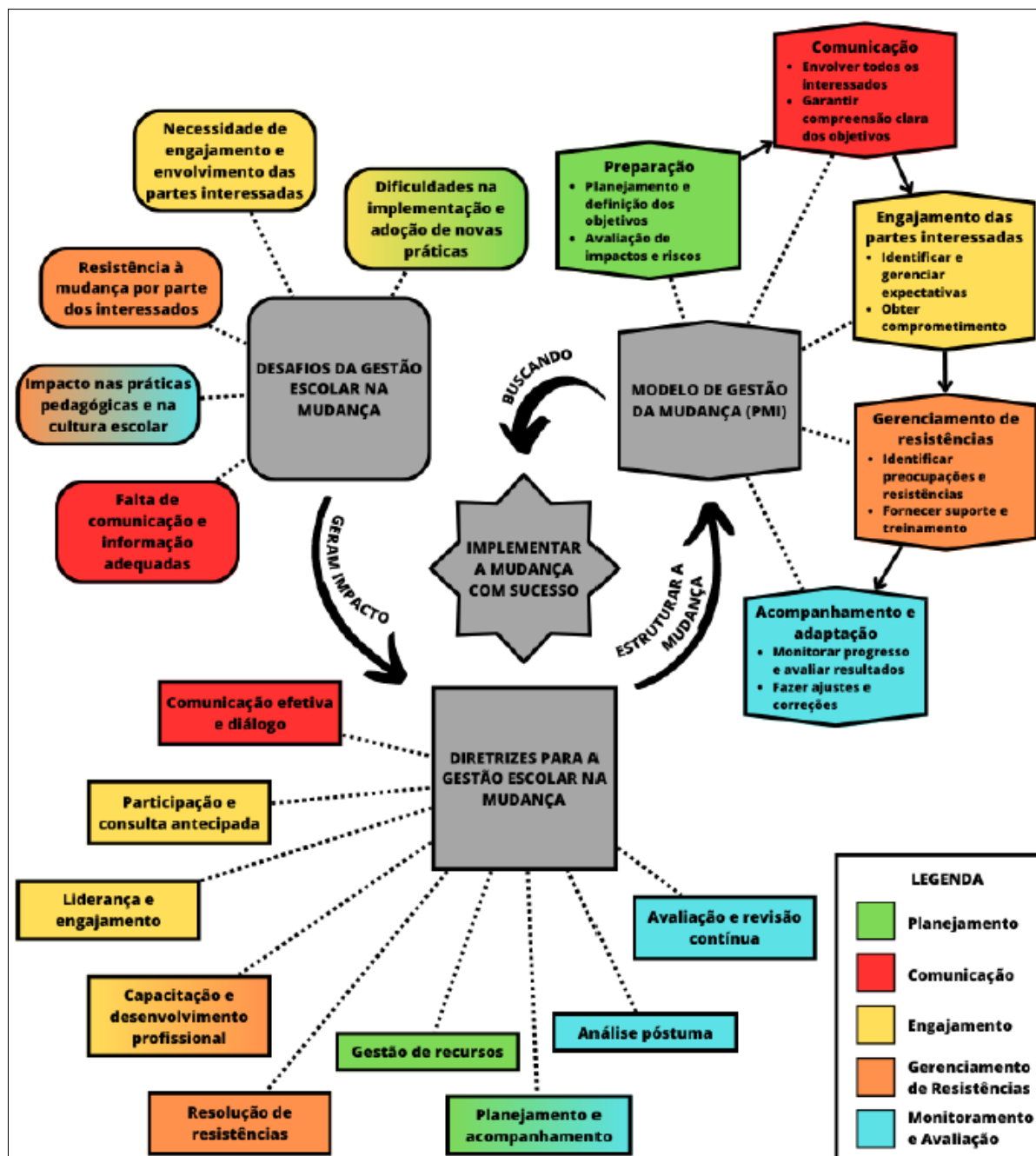
	Identify problems and discrepancies in the process and use this information to adjust future plans and sustain the intended change.
	Collect feedback from those involved to continuously improve the change management process.
<b>Leadership and Engagement</b>	Engage educational leaders and school managers in promoting change, providing them with the necessary resources and support.
	Establish clear and measurable goals to guide the implementation of changes
	Acknowledge and value the effort and engagement of those involved in driving the change
<b>Training and Professional Development</b>	Offer training and professional development programs for teachers and staff involved in the changes
	Provide technical and pedagogical support to help professionals adapt their practices and methodologies to the new demands
<b>Planning and Monitoring</b>	Develop a detailed implementation plan for the changes, defining the steps, responsibilities, and deadlines
	Designate a team responsible for monitoring and overseeing the change process, ensuring that actions are carried out as planned.
<b>Resource Management</b>	Ensure the availability of adequate resources (financial, material, technological) for the implementation of the proposed changes
	Conduct a needs assessment for resources and seek partnerships and funding sources to meet these demands
<b>Evaluation and Continuous Review</b>	Carry out periodic evaluations to check the progress of the changes and the effectiveness of the actions implemented
	Promote a culture of learning and continuous improvement, using the results from evaluations to review and adjust the change management plans

Source: Table created by the authors.

A proposed change management model for the municipal schools of Pelotas was developed, considering three sets of elements. The challenges of school management include resistance to change, lack of adequate communication and information, difficulties in implementing new practices, impact on pedagogical practices and school culture, and the need for stakeholder engagement. The proposed model follows the elements of PMI, such as preparation, communication, stakeholder engagement, resistance management, monitoring, and adaptation. Additionally, guidelines for school management during times of change are provided, including effective communication, early participation, resistance resolution, post-change analysis, leadership and engagement, training and professional development, planning and monitoring, resource management, evaluation, and continuous review. It is important to carefully adapt this model to each specific educational context or situation, as it is a general tool. The proposed model can be seen in Figure 1, below.

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS

**FIGURE 1 – PROPOSED CHANGE MANAGEMENT MODEL FOR MUNICIPAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**



Source: Created by the authors.

It is recommended to use both the guidelines for school management during times of change and the change management model for the municipal public schools of Pelotas simultaneously. It is important to emphasize the engagement and collaboration of all those involved to ensure the



effectiveness of implementing the necessary or desired transformations. Additionally, it is essential to consider the specificities of each school context during the change process.

## **Final considerations**

Considering the constant global dynamics and transformations, school management must be adaptable and flexible to achieve satisfactory results for society (BES et al., 2019). Thus, change management is one of the pillars for the sustainability of educational institutions in the post-pandemic period, according to research conducted by Rasli et al. (2024). In this context, this study investigated the changes that occurred in the municipal schools of Pelotas and the change management approach adopted by the managers. Understanding the challenges faced by managers is essential, as knowledge and identification of difficulties encourage the search for solutions (BARBOSA, 2023).

Through interviews with the managers, the following essential challenges were identified in the municipal schools of Pelotas: resistance to change, poor communication, obstacles in implementing new practices, impact on pedagogical strategies, and the need to involve stakeholders.

To support managers in overcoming these challenges, guidelines and a specific change management model for these schools were developed. The proposed model incorporates essential elements from the change management model (PMI, 2013) and provides specific guidance for school management during periods of change, which includes effective communication, early consultation, resistance resolution, post-implementation analysis, leadership and engagement, training and professional development, planning and monitoring, resource management, and continuous evaluation and review.

The simultaneous use of these tools, with an emphasis on collaboration and engagement from all stakeholders, considering the particularities of each school context, is recommended. By promoting the connection between administration and education, expanding knowledge in the areas of school management and change management, this study significantly contributes to school management in Pelotas.

The limitations of this research include the number of managers interviewed and the restriction to the municipal public education system of Pelotas. With this in mind, future research is suggested to investigate the implementation of change management models in different regions and educational contexts in order to assess the possibility of generalizing the results. Moreover, comparative studies between various approaches to change management could provide valuable insights into more effective practices for school administration. Additionally, a promising area for research would be to

The contribution of change management to the challenges of school management: analysis of municipal public schools in the city of Pelotas/RS investigate specific strategies to overcome resistance to change in different school contexts, such as a longitudinal study that examines the effectiveness of training and continuous development programs for school managers in managing resistance to change.

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